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The Odd Chabad Connection Between Putin and Trump

But, remember, Trump told us he has absolutely nothing to do with Russia and no business interests there.

by **Martin Longman**
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Three days before the presidential election, Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump visited the Queens gravesite of Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson and, according to *The Times of Israel*, they prayed for Donald Trump's victory.

Schneerson, who died in 1994, is an interesting character. Although he never claimed it himself, some of his followers consider him the Messiah, and others believe he is **still alive**.

> Menachem Mendel Schneerson, known to many as the Rebbe, was a Russian Empire-born American Orthodox Jewish rabbi, and the last Lubavitcher Rebbe. He is considered one of the most influential Jewish leaders of the 20th century.
>
> As leader of the Chabad-Lubavitch movement, he took an insular Hasidic group that almost came to an end with the Holocaust and transformed it into one of the most influential movements in world Jewry, with an international network of over 3,000 educational and social centers. The institutions he established include kindergartens, schools, drug-rehabilitation centers, care-homes for the disabled and synagogues.

The Kushner family is Modern Orthodox, and of course Ivanka converted to Judaism prior to her marriage to Jared. Still, according to **Ben Schreckinger** of *Politico Magazine*, Kushner was **affiliated** with the Chabad house at Harvard when he was a student there. Since settling in DC, the couple has reportedly been attending services at a Chabad synagogue.

What Jared and Ivanka want to do in their spiritual lives is their business, and I have no intention of casting any aspersions on the Chabad-Lubavitch movement or Rabbi Schneerson. I do however want to explore some things that may circle back to this pre-election pilgrimage to Schneerson's grave.

Let's begin here:

> Starting in 1999, [Vladimir] Putin enlisted two of his closest confidants, the oligarchs Lev Leviev and Roman Abramovich, who would go on to become Chabad's biggest patrons worldwide, to create the Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia under the leadership of Chabad rabbi Berel Lazar, who would come to be known as "Putin's rabbi."

There's a good chance that if you know of Roman Abramovich, you know him as the owner of the Chelsea Football Club of the English Premier League. You may not know that he was a **victor** (along with Paul Manafort's patron **Oleg Deripaska**) in the **bloody aluminum wars** of the 1990s, or that he was reportedly the person who convinced Boris Yeltsin that Putin would be a proper successor. You probably are not aware that Ivanka Trump is very close friends with Abramovich's wife, Dasha Zhukova, with whom she recently attended the U.S. Open tennis tournament in Queens. Zhukova reportedly attended the inauguration as Ivanka's personal guest.

It takes a little more doing to understand the Trump family's connections to Lev Leviev. To begin with, we need to go back to Bayrock, the company that Donald Trump teamed up with to build his Trump Soho project.

There were three main actors in that enterprise. One was convicted mob associate and murky FBI informant Felix Sater. Another was Tevfik Arif, a shady man with likely Russian intelligence connections who was once was arrested by the Turks on Mustafa Kamal Ataturk's yacht and "charged with running an international underage prostitution ring." The third was the late Tamir Sapir, another man with ties to Russian intelligence. If you're interested in this aspect of the story, I refer you to my **Trump's Soho Project, the Mob, and Russian Intelligence** article and also Mike Lofgren's piece: **Mobbed Up**, both written in late February.

Interestingly, all these men have connections to the Chabad movement. Felix Sater was honored as Man of the Year in 2014 by the Port Washington Chabad house. The same Chabad house's website lists Tevfik Arif, who is not Jewish, "among its top 13 benefactors."

But it's Tamir Sapir who links Trump back directly to Lev Leviev.

Pay close attention to this:

> …the late billionaire Tamir Sapir, was born in the Soviet state of Georgia and arrived in 1976 in New York, where he opened an electronics store in the Flatiron district that, according to the *New York Times*, **catered** largely to KGB agents.
>
> Trump has called Sapir "a great friend." In December 2007, he hosted the wedding of Sapir's daughter, Zina, at Mar-a-Lago. The event featured performances by Lionel Ritchie and the Pussycat Dolls. The groom, Rotem Rosen, was the CEO of the American branch of Africa Israel, the Putin oligarch Leviev's holding company.
>
> Five months later, in early June 2008, Zina Sapir and Rosen held a bris for their newborn son. Invitations to the bris described Rosen as Leviev's "right-hand man." By then, Leviev had become the single largest funder of Chabad worldwide, and he personally arranged for the bris to take place at Schneerson's grave, Chabad's most holy site.

The man I want to focus on is Rotem Rosen. He is described here as the CEO of Leviev's American holding company and his "right hand man." Now, remember that Leviev was described at the top as one of two oligarch's who Putin tapped to establish the "Federation of Jewish Communities of Russia under the leadership of Chabad rabbi Berel Lazar, who would come to be known as 'Putin's rabbi.'"

Now, let's flash ahead to Trump's trip to Moscow to host the Miss Universe pageant in 2013.

> After the contest, Trump attended a vodka-infused 1 a.m. afterparty at which ticket holders were promised a meeting with the New Yorker, along with the pageant contestants.
>
> He also met with the Agalarovs to talk business…
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> …Joining Trump's November 2013 meeting with the Agalarovs were **Alex Sapir and Rotem Rosen**, a pair of New York-based Russian developers who helped to develop the Trump Soho hotel and condominium project in Manhattan.

You should know the Agalarovs because **they initiated** the undisclosed June 2016 Trump Tower meeting between Kushner, Manafort and Donald Trump Jr. and a brood of Kremlin-connected conspirators offering dirt on Hillary Clinton in return for sanctions relief.

Alex Sapir is the son of **Tamir Sapir**, brother of Zina, and brother-in-law of Rotem Rosen.

Just so we're clear, Trump hosted the wedding of Lev Leviev's right-hand man at Mar-a-Lago. Lev Leviev is so close to Putin that he was one of two oligarchs tapped to help him gain control of the leadership of the Russian Jewish community back when he assumed power.

> Two decades ago, as the Russian president set about consolidating power on one side of the world, he embarked on a project to supplant his country's existing Jewish civil society and replace it with a parallel structure loyal to him…
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> …In 1999, soon after he became prime minister, Putin enlisted Abramovich and Leviev to create the Federation of Russian Jewish Communities. Its purpose was to undermine the existing umbrella for Russia's Jewish civil society, the Russian Jewish Congress, led by oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky, a potential threat to Putin and President Boris Yeltsin. A year later, Gusinsky was arrested by Putin's government and forced into exile.
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> At the time, Russia already had a chief rabbi as recognized by the Russian Jewish Congress, Adolf Shayevich. But Abramovich and Leviev installed Chabad rabbi Lazar at the head of their rival organization. The Kremlin removed Shayevich from its religious affairs council, and ever since it has instead recognized Lazar as Russia's chief rabbi, leaving the country with two rival claimants to the title.

These are extraordinarily close ties between Putin and Trump and that also connect Trump's business discussions in 2013 about Moscow real estate projects with the June 2016 meeting in Trump Tower that has become one of the strongest pieces of evidence of collusion in the election.

Seen in this light, Jared and Ivanka's pre-election pilgrimage to Rabbi Schneerson's grave takes on a different tone.

And then there's **this**:

> In May 2015, a month before Trump officially entered the Republican presidential primary, Kushner bought a majority stake in the old New York Times building on West 43rd Street from Leviev for $295 million.

I'm not sure if it was actually a majority stake or just **a really expensive condo**, but Mueller is looking into it and it may tie into the firing of Preet Bharara:

> As special prosecutor Robert Mueller and Congress both continue to search for ties between the Trumps, Kushner and Russia, Kushner's acquisition of a commercial condo in the New York Times building has become one of many targets. In 2015, Kushner and his family business, Kushner Cos., bought a portion of the building from Russian real estate billionaire Lev Leviev for $295M, The Guardian reports. The transaction first came up due to the $285M Kushner borrowed from Deutsche Bank to complete the transaction. Deutsche Bank and two companies tied to Leviev, Africa Israel Investments and Prevezon, have all recently been the subject of money laundering investigations. A laundering case against Prevezon led by then-U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara abruptly ended in May, two months after Trump fired Bharara, with a $6M settlement that raised eyebrows.

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